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ASIATIC ART
Indian Sculpture: Room A 2

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

GALLERY BOOK

SECRETARY
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Department of Asiatic Art

~~Room A 2~~

INDIAN SCULPTURE

(Detailed description)

Room A 2

INDIAN STONE SCULPTURE

The visitor is supposed to enter the room by the north door (from the Indian corridor, Room A 1) and to examine first the two central cases (Cases 21 and 22); then, starting from the south door (which leads to Room A 3), to follow round the wall to the right until the south door is again reached.

The Gallery Books for Room A 3 should also be consulted.

(This page out for Sale copies from 6/27/50 = per order Asiatic Dept.)

CASE 21

25.459

Railing cross-bar with medallions on each side
Sandstone. Mathurā, probably 1st century B.C.

On one side, an expanded lotus; on the other, a "full vessel" (puṇṇaghaṭa) with lotus sprays rising from it. The "full vessel" is a symbol of plenty, and as a life symbol, analogous to the "Holy Grail."

(Case 21 continued)

26.96 .

Railing cross-bar with medallions on each side

Sandstone. Mathurā, probably 2nd-1st century B.C.

On one side a fantastic animal; on the other, a Bodhi-tree temple (representing the Buddha on the occasion of the Great Enlightenment). The sacred tree rises from within the temple, which is understood to be square in plan and open to the sky within. The arched doorway, sloping pillars, and heavy entablature, exactly reproducing the details of the original structure, will be observed. The umbrella and banners associated with the tree are marks of honor. The relief is probably intended to depict the shrine erected by Aśoka round the Bodhi-tree at Bodhgayā, where the Buddha attained Enlightenment.

(Case 21 continued)

25.466

Part of a door jamb

Sandstone. Mathurā, 2nd century A.D.

A panel enclosing figures of two lay-worshippers. The man carries a floral garland in the right hand, a basket of flowers in the left; the woman has hands folded in worship. The bottom of the panel next above, with the feet of two other worshippers, and the top of the panel below are also preserved. Each panel has a railing below, and a roof with attic-windows above.

(Case 21 continued)

25.445

Makara-face

Sandstone. Mathurā, Gupta period, 5th century A.D.

Originally formed the crowning motif of the nimbus attached to a figure of a deity. The full face makara, often called kīrttimukha ("glory-face"), does not appear in architecture before the Gupta period.

(Case 21 continued)

25.456

Part of a door jamb

Sandstone. Mathurā, late Kuṣāna, about 3rd-4th century A.D.

At the base, two figures, perhaps a Yakṣa and a Yakṣī, are represented standing under a tree; the female is holding up a "full vessel" at shoulder level.

(Case 21 continued)

21.1703

Fragment of a miniature railing

Sandstone. Mathurā, Kuṣāṇa, ca. 100 A.D.

At the back, lotus rosettes. In front, a bearded Bacchanalian Yakṣa (Silenus type), supported by two women.

(Case 21 continued)

25.461

Railing cross-bar, with medallion on one side

Sandstone. Mathurā school, Śuṅga, probably second century B.C.

The heavy type of the horse and the trappings recall Bharhut forms. It should be observed that the use of a bit is clearly indicated, and also that of a stirrup. The stirrup was employed in India earlier than anywhere else in the world, other early Indian examples being known from Bhājā (ca. 200 B.C.) and Sāñcī (ca. 100 B.C.). The scarf flowing out on the air behind the rider is a characteristic motif later very commonly found in Sāsānian art.

CASE 22

21.1715

Bust of a Yaksī

Sandstone, Mathurā, 1st century A.D. or earlier

The hands are clasped behind the head, a gesture expressing amorous languor. Figures of Yaksīs are commonly found on the railing pillars and gateways of early Buddhist and Jaina shrines; they represent popular divinities (Devatās) of prosperity, fertility, and love. For complete figures see Nos. 26.32, 27.447, and 26.26 in Room A 3 adjoining.

(Case 22 continued)

21.1698

Bust of a Yakṣī

Sandstone. Mathurā, 1st century A.D. or earlier

See No. 21.1715 (preceding).

(Case 22 continued)

27.448

The Buddha, seated on a lion throne

Sandstone. Mathurā, late second century A.D.

The hair is represented as long and wavy; the usnisa (cranial protuberance) is inconspicuous. The nimbus, largely broken away, has the scalloped edge and plain centre characteristic of Kuṣāna types. The robe covers both shoulders and conceals the legs between the knees; one end of it is held in the left hand. The right hand is raised in a gesture of assurance (abhaya mudrā). On the pedestal, between the lions, is a seated Bodhisattva or Buddha between two worshippers. This second Kuṣāna type, to some extent reflecting Gandhāran formulae, appears only in the second century, after Kaniṣka and not much later is replaced by the final type with curly hair and very distinct usnīsa protuberance. For the earlier Kuṣāna Buddha type see Nos. 17.3120 and 25.437 in Room A 3 adjoining, and for the final formula, No. 21.2230 in the same room.

(Case 22 continued)

25.453

Head of a king

Sandstone. Mathurā, ca. sixth century A.D.

The hair falls in curling locks to the shoulders; the beard is represented by small, regularly arranged, circular bosses. An elaborate jewelled cylindrical crown (mukuṭa) is worn. The nimbus is almost entirely lost.

(Case 22 continued)

28.7

Head of a Yakṣa (?)

Sandstone. Mathurā, late Kusāna or early Gupta period, ca. 4th century A.D.

The hair and beard are treated as in the case of No. 25.460, but a moustache is indicated, and the face is of a demoniac type with bulging eyes and open mouth showing fang-like eye-teeth. The head-dress is a conical cap, probably of felt, rolled over at the top.

(Case 22 continued)

25.458

Flying angel (gandharva or vidyādhara)

Sandstone. Mathurā, Gupta period, 5th-6th century A.D.

Part of a larger composition. It is characteristic of Indian art though with many exceptions at an earlier period, that the flying figures are not represented as winged; the movement is usually suggested by the position of the limbs, and by the flying drapery.

South Wall, west of door

27.400

Head of Śiva

Sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), 10th-11th century.

The hair is dressed high in ascetic fashion, but a tiara is worn. The third eye in the centre of the forehead establishes the Śaiva character of the head.

CASE 18
Mediaeval North Indian Sculpture

25.476

Harihara

Sandstone. Northern India (Bundelkhand), ca. 1000 A.D.

Harihara combines in one person the forms of Viṣṇu (Hari) and Śiva (Hara). The figure holds accordingly the conch and discus of Viṣṇu in the left hands, the rosary and trident of Śiva in the right; further, the head-dress to proper left represents the crown of Viṣṇu, to proper right the matted locks of Śiva. At the base, on the Viṣṇu side, is a kneeling worshipper (possibly Garuḍa); on the Śiva side, the bull Nandi. Above, to proper right is a seated figure of Brahmā, the lower right hand making the gesture of assurance, the other hands holding the sacrificial spoon, book (the Vedas), and water vessel; on the proper left, a seated figure of Śiva holding a rosary, trident, serpent, and water vessel. The work, carried out in fine grained and very intractable material, is of high technical accomplishment. Compare No. 25.438 in Room A 3 adjoining.

(Case 18 continued)

21.1836

Viṣṇu (Trivikrama)

Black slate. Bihār or Bengal, Pāla period, ca. 1000 A.D.

The deity stands erect, holding a lotus (broken) in the lower right hand, a mace in the upper right, discus in the upper left, and conch in the lower left. This formula suffices to identify Trivikrama, one of twenty-four forms in which the deity Viṣṇu is represented. Right and left of the deity, and of smaller stature, are two female figures, those of the goddesses Lakṣmī and Pṛthvī or Bhūmi Devī, his consorts.

(Case 18 continued)

25.478

Laksmī

Sandstone. Rājputāna, ca. 10th century

The Indian goddess of Fortune. The fragment, complete only so far as the head, bust and nimbus are concerned, originally existed in the form of the composition known as Laksmī with the Elephants (Gaja-Laksmī). In this subject, which has remained in currency from the second century B.C. up to the present day, the goddess is represented as seated or standing on a lotus flower, and between elephants who pour over her the waters contained in two inverted vessels. These elephants and waters represent clouds and rain, the sources of all wealth in a tropical agricultural country. The goddess hereself is a Lady of Abundance who associates herself with victorious kings. Under another aspect she is more particularly associated with Visnu as his consort and "Energy."

West Wall

17.1606

Apsaras (nymph)

Sandstone. Northern India (Rājputāna or Bundelkhand), ca. 10th century

A fragment, once part of the exterior decoration of a temple. The elaborate coiffure should be observed; the hair is interwoven with fresh flowers. The hands are clasped above the head in a gesture of amorous languor. The facial expression is gentle and serene.

(West Wall continued)

21.1699

Part of the base of a large image

Sandstone. Northern India (Rājputāna or Bundelkhand), ca. 11th century

Grouped attendant figures; from the right side of the base of a larger composition.

(West Wall continued)

17.1377

Head of Buddha

Sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), ca. 11th century

The hair, according to the usual formula, is represented by small bosses (curls). The head is similar to a still finer example in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, of which Dr. Denman W. Ross has written: "In it we see an extraordinary likeness to life; almost a portrait; and more than that, a subtle suggestion and expression of a state of mind and of emotion. The eyes are almost closed, not in sleep, but in meditation, and there is a smile upon the lips suggesting a vision of everlasting peace. Here is a work of Art which is descriptively and specifically true to Nature and to life, and beautiful, because we can think of nothing, of its kind, more nobly conceived or better expressed."

(West Wall continued)

26.13

Head of Visnu

Grey sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), about 11th century

Apparently a portrait head of a king, but in Khmer art innumerable posthumous portraits of deified kings were set up in the form of the deity worshipped by the deceased and are thus indistinguishable from images of the deity. It is very probably that in the present case we have to do with a head of Visnu, or at any rate that of a king identified after death with that deity.

CASE 20
Siamese and Cambodian

27.401

Head of Buddha

Sandstone. Siam (southern), 14th century

Thai type with refined features, arched brows, etc.

(Case 20 continued)

26.206

Head of Viṣṇu

Sandstone. Southern Cambodia, late 6th century

"Primitive Khmer" or "pre-Khmer" sculpture: a more definitely Indian character distinguishes the sculpture of this early period from that of classic Cambodian (Khmer) art. The cylindrical head-dress with lateral extensions has Indian prototypes at Amarāvatī and Sāñcī.

(Case 20 continued)

27.398

Head of Buddha

Sandstone. Siam (southern), 12th-14th century

Khmer type with large mouth, straight brows, etc.

North Wall

27.399

Head of deity or king

Sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), 11th-12th century

A typical classical Khmer head, with large straight mouth, horizontal brows, and cylindrical coiffure.

(North Wall continued)

17.1016

Head of Buddha

Sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), 14th-15th century

The much elevated uṣṇīṣa, in five stages, and the upward sloping almond eyes, illustrate the influence exerted at this time by Siamese (Thai) on Cambodian art.

CASE 19
Cambodian (Khmer)

25.34

Head not identified

Sandstone. Aṅkor Thoṁ (?), ca. 11th century

(Case 19 continued)

23.446

Apsaras

Sandstone. Ankor Thom (Bayon temple?), ca. 1000 A.D.

Dancing apsaras, with part of another to right. The heads of two horses on the left.

(Case 19 continued)

21.2531

Mural fragment

Sandstone. Aṅkor Thoṁ, ca. 11th century

Conventional lotus ornament, with seated figures of bearded ṛsis (perhaps Agastya), each surrounded by a flaming glory.

(Case 19 continued)

25.871

Jamb sculpture fragment

Sandstone. Añkor Thom (?), 12th century (?)

Rearing lion and conventional foliage.

(North Wall continued)

27.423

Seated deity, probably Visnu

Basalt. Eastern Javanese, 12th-13th century

East Wall

17.837

Head of Buddha

Cast copper over earthly core. Siamese, Ayuthiā, ca. 15th century

The inlaid mother-of-pearl representing the whites of the eyes is still preserved, but the pupils of the eyes are missing.

(East Wall continued)

21.1721

Visnu with Laksmī

Sandstone. North Indian (Rājputāna), 12th-14th century

In all probability, part of a seated group. Of Visnu's four arms, the two proper left, holding the discus and mace, are alone preserved.

(East Wall continued)

25.161

A royal donor

Sandstone. Northern India (Bundelkhand), 12th century

Effigy of a royal donor. The king is bearded and moustachioed, and holds up between his hands an offering of a garland of flowers.

(East Wall continued)

19.801

Head of a Bodhisattva

Stone. Early Pāla, ca. 10th century, Bihār or Bengal

Probably Avalokiteśvara, or Maitreya. A Bodhisattva is a future Buddha, but one who has renounced the immediate attainment of Nirvāna, in order to devote himself to the salvation of all beings. The Bodhisattvas are regarded as emanations of the four Dhyāni Buddhas, and are worshipped as gracious deities. As such they are represented in royal costume, with a crown and jewelry, and thus may be distinguished from Buddha figures, though a type of crowned Buddha is also known. The presence of the ūrnā (mole or hair-tuft) between the brows will be remarked.

CASE 17
Greeko-Buddhist Art of Gandhāra

28.61

The Parinirvāna of Buddha

Black slate, Gandhāra, 4th-5th century A.D.

The Buddha reclining in the usual position. Below, left, a grieving figure; centre, the transcendental Buddha seated in dhyāna; right, Vajrapāni, the Buddha's "guardian angel" with the vajra held in his left hand. Above, grieving deities (broken on the left).

(Case 17 continued)

25.435

Standing figure of Buddha

Black slate. Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D.

The Buddha, as a religious mendicant seeking gifts of food, holds in his left hand a begging bowl.

(Case 17 continued)

25.467

Vessantara Jātaka

Grey slate. Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D.

The story relates the infinite generosities of the Buddha in his penultimate incarnation as the Bodhisattva, Prince Vessantara. The first of his great gifts, here illustrated, was that of the rain-giving white elephant of the city of Jettatura. The composition as here seen occurs already at Bharhut some three centuries earlier and has remained current to the present day.

(Case 17 continued)

19.802

Head of Buddha

Black slate. Gandhāra, 2nd century A.D.

The characteristic Hellenistic features and arrangement of the hair in waving locks sharply differentiate the type from that of the indigenous Indian Kuṣāna Buddha types from Mathurā (see Nos. 17.3120 and 25.437 in Room A 3 adjoining). The ūrṇā (mole between the brows) is conspicuous, but the uṣnīṣa (cranial protuberance) is disguised by the hair.

South Wall
(east of door)

21.1072

Head of Agastya, or Śiva, or a king

Black sandstone. Cambodian (Khmer), 10th century

The bearded Śiva type is now generally regarded as representing the great South Indian sage Agastya, whose cult was widely distributed in Java and no doubt also in Cambodia.